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**FWP Fact Sheet
Frequently Asked Questions
Elk Shoulder Season Guidelines**

What are shoulder season guidelines?

"Shoulder season" guidelines will be used to create elk hunting opportunities with firearms before and after the general rifle season to increase harvest and improve management in specific places, mostly on private lands where elk numbers exceed local elk population objectives.

Are elk shoulder seasons the same as "Ranching for Wildlife"?

No. Shoulder seasons have nothing in common with privatizing a public resource. Shoulder seasons deal with one thing only: elk population objectives. FWP is not offering landowners elk tags to sell or otherwise incentivizing landowner participation. The purpose of a shoulder season is to help the landowner reduce elk numbers.

Will shoulder seasons adjust how game damage eligibility for landowners is determined?

Shoulder seasons won't determine a private landowner's game damage eligibility. In Montana, game damage eligibility has long been based on private landowners allowing public access during the general hunting season. That won't change.

Will shoulder seasons be applied statewide?

No. Only local circumstances will determine if a shoulder season is proposed. Each shoulder season proposal would be accompanied by an open, public process. Any specific proposal would require public review and Fish & Wildlife Commission approval during the 2016-17 biennial hunting season-setting process—and potentially with limited pilot projects for the 2015 season pending public comment and commission approval.

Are shoulder season harvest criteria aimed at forcing hunting access to private land?

No. FWP has no authority to force access to private land and FWP recognizes and respects that landowners alone decide to allow hunter access or not. If harvest criteria are not met those hunting districts would simply not be eligible for a shoulder season.

Why are shoulder seasons needed?

Governor Steve Bullock, lawmakers, hunters, landowners and others all have expressed concern and accordingly expect FWP to manage elk at established standards. In Montana there are 80 areas over objective, 39 within objective, and 19 below objective. It would simply be irresponsible for FWP to continue to allow a number of Montana's elk populations to grow beyond management objectives without trying additional measures. Landowners will benefit from reduced elk numbers. Hunters will benefit from additional opportunities to harvest elk. To be clear, the primary reason FWP proposed shoulder seasons is to reduce elk populations where they are over objective.

When would shoulder seasons occur?

If approved by the commission, shoulder seasons would occur before or after the five-week general firearm season that typically begins in late October and ends the Sunday following Thanksgiving Day. Shoulder season hunts could then happen as early as Aug. 15 and could run no later than Feb. 15. Each F&W Commission-approved shoulder season would include an end date.

Will FWP really apply and follow the harvest criteria?

Yes. The entire shoulder season package demands a renewed partnership among FWP, the F&W Commission, hunters and landowners. FWP information on elk harvests needs to be accurate, efficient, and timely. The commission needs to balance social values with wildlife science and legal authority. Hunters need to be respectful and capable guests on private land. And landowners need to define and provide a level of access that matches the elk population on their properties. In other words, shoulder season guidelines assume that all parties are interested in fewer elk. The overall process will, over time, identify areas where that assumption fails. It may be that the biggest return from shoulder seasons is the more precise awareness of where and why this four-way partnership fails to materialize. If criteria are not met, FWP will propose ending the shoulder season. Remember, too, that shoulder seasons wouldn't be indefinite; each F&W Commission-approved shoulder season would include an end date. The aim is to cap and reduce elk populations by comparing elk numbers to how much harvest is actually occurring.

Have you considered establishing shoulder seasons without applying harvest criteria?

A shoulder season concept was used in Montana prior to 2006 and it wasn't successful across the board. FWP discovered, for instance, that when landowners deferred hunting access from the general season to a late season, the elk harvest during the general season was reduced throughout the hunting district. Why? Elk moved from public and private lands open to hunting to private lands with little or no access. This reduced the hunting and harvest opportunities associated with the general season. The bottom line is we learned that a late season alone won't work in those circumstances.

Some are suggesting that shoulder seasons will eliminate elk on public lands. Is this true?

No. Shoulder seasons would focus on private lands during early seasons and would be carefully applied on public lands, if at all, during late seasons. Local circumstances will almost always direct shoulder seasons to private lands. In some situations of mixed-land ownership, some limited shoulder season hunting may need to occur on public lands to ensure elk do not take refuge there and essentially eliminate all opportunities for harvest.

Are bull elk included in shoulder seasons?

Potentially, yes. In areas where elk are over objective both bull and antlerless opportunities will be considered. Any bull hunting opportunity during a shoulder season would be regulated by a permit system.

Could FWP come back and propose to remove shoulder seasons if harvest criteria aren't being met?

Yes. The proposed guidelines outline how such a decision would be made and the public process that would follow. While future commission decisions can't be guaranteed, the approved guidelines include ending specific shoulder seasons if criteria are not met. In other words, a shoulder seasons wouldn't be indefinite. Each commission-approved shoulder season would include an end date.

How can I keep informed?

For more information, visit the FWP website at fwp.mt.gov. Click "[Shoulder Season Guidelines](#)." Comments on six proposed elk shoulder season pilot projects will be taken until 5 p.m. on Nov. 6. The six hunting districts include 392, in the west side of the Big Belt Mountains; 445, 446, 449 and 452, on the east side of the Big Belts and the Castle Mountains; and 410, in the Missouri River Breaks.

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